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Testimony in Support of HB 6616 - An Act Concerning the Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status.

Good afternoon Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Leslie Blatteau and I live in New Haven, CT. I strongly support HB 6616 to expand access to the HUSKY program to undocumented people in CT up to the age of 26. I am the President of New Haven Federation of Teachers, a union representing over 1700 educators who work in New Haven Public Schools. We belong to Recovery For All – a statewide coalition fighting for a better future for Connecticut, bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations.

As a union leader who represents the professionals who work with youth and their families everyday in schools across our city, this is an issue of critical importance in our community. Our entire school district is working hard to reengage with students and families as continued pandemic related disruptions interfere with the stability that our school communities deserve. Educators, counselors, and social workers are eager to support students and families to address attendance issues and improve social, emotional, and academic outcomes. However, we need your help. The children we serve in our public schools must be able to count on the state of Connecticut to ensure they have access to healthcare regardless of their immigration status.

While we do not know the exact number of how many NHPS students and parents are undocumented, **we know that 4,228 students – one in five NHPS students – is an English Language Learner.** An additional group of students are fluent English speakers, but their parents are undocumented immigrants. This means that thousands of students – **possibly one fifth of our NHPS students – have parents who are struggling with medical debt, who have zero access to mental health services, and who do not go to any health center because of the bills that they won't be able to pay.**

Given that 58% of the roughly 113,000 undocumented immigrants in CT do not have any form of health insurance coverage, we must prioritize this critical issue. First, we must take action now because healthcare is a human right - we all deserve health care. And a majority of voters in CT agree. Second, we must take action now because this does not only affect our community members who lack health insurance, this affects all of us. Public health depends on increasing access to healthcare, not limiting access. And as public employees who care deeply about the communities we serve, we want to ensure that our students and families get the support they need - to ensure they can come to school healthy and without interruption and to ensure that the full range of services that only healthcare professionals provide are in place.

New Haven is a proud sanctuary city - our public schools welcome students and families from around the world and seek to provide them with the necessary support to help them belong, learn, and thrive. Please recognize that this work depends on collaboration with those outside of our school buildings as well. Our undocumented students and families deserve access to healthcare. This is why I support HB 6616 and hope the committee will vote in favor. In the future, I urge this committee to continue working to expand HUSKY access to all immigrant people, regardless of age or immigration status. Thank you.